

BUSINESS & LABOREXHIBIT NO. 7DATE 1-28-09BILL NO. SB 254

Testimony against Senate Bill 254 Layna George

My name is Layna George, and I am representing WEEL--Working for Equality and Economic Liberation as the Interim Executive Director, and I'm representing WEEL members. I oppose Senate Bill 253.

- WEEL is a social and economic justice, grassroots organization made up of people experiencing poverty and our supporters.
 - In 2006, WEEL worked with many organizations and individual volunteers to gather signatures to put I-151, Raise Montana on the ballot. Then in the election, over 70% of Montanans passed the initiative, an overwhelming majority.
 - If this bill is passes, it will make it harder for people who are already struggling to make ends meet.
 - Food prices, utility bills, rent, and the cost of living will continue to rise, but minimum wage will stay the same, making it increasingly difficult to get by.
 - During 2008, there was an increase in the number of people applying for food stamps and other public assistance programs. This is because people had to choose between buying food, taking their children to the doctor, and paying the utility bills. Having more people on public assistance will cost the state more than raising the minimum wage a small amount each year.
 - The minimum wage is not a living wage, but to not adjust the minimum wage each year for inflation throws more people into poverty and more people will fall through the cracks of society.
 - This bill is an economic and social injustice. Montanans voted overwhelmingly for I-151 and this bill will take regular, necessary minimum wage increase away from people struggling to survive.

I oppose Senate Bill 253.